open wide our hearts
the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 6 Activity: The Unity of God's Family

Doctrinal elements:

The Profession of Faith
"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

- The Church symbolizes the unity of the whole human race. **(CCC 775)**
- The Church is the sign and instrument of God's communion with all humanity, gathering together people of every land and tongue. **(CCC 776, 780)**

The Sacramental Economy
The Sacramental Celebration of the Paschal Mystery

- The Church encourages people of different cultures to celebrate the liturgy in different ways so that all people may know Christ in the beauty and richness of their own culture. **(CCC 1204, 1207)**

"This love 'comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).'"

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Recognize that the unity of humanity—in all its diversity—is rooted in our union with God.
2. Celebrate the diversity of God's family as expressed in liturgical celebrations by various cultures.
3. Identify as problematic the failure to represent the diversity of God's family in publications, illustrations, and narratives of the predominant culture.
4. Successfully inventory their own or another grade level's classroom materials to assess diversity and representation.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Christ heals all divisions, including those that are at the core of racism."
- "We can also draw upon the incredible diversity of the Church worldwide in providing education within the family and make clear that God dwells in the equal dignity of each person."
- "To work at ending racism, we need to engage the world and encounter others – to see, maybe for the first time, those who are on the peripheries of our own limited view."
- "It is the love of Christ that binds together the Church, and this love reaches out beyond the Church to all peoples."
- "Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God."

Instructions for the Lesson

As homework prior to this lesson, have students research what percentages of various ethnic groups make up the Church in the U.S. (or in the diocese, city, county, or state). If in a religious education setting where students are not assigned homework, the educators can find these numbers and bring them to share later in the lesson.

Find some examples on YouTube of the Eucharistic Liturgy being celebrated in another culture. Show a few examples at the beginning of class.

- Ask students to share what they noticed about these celebrations. Instruct students to share observations, but not judgments. (For example, begin statements with "I noticed that…" instead of "It was strange how they…")

This is an important teaching moment about the value of diversity and noticing and observing differences and our reactions to those differences.

- If your classroom has the blessing of having students present who are from a different cultural background than most other students, be sure *not* to ask students of a particular background to speak for their whole group.
- If you are blessed to have a multi-cultural classroom with students of many backgrounds, consider inviting *everyone* in the group to speak from their own experience—i.e., what special gifts from your culture are celebrated as part of the liturgy in your (or your parents') country of origin?

Review the following catechetical concepts:

- The Church is a "sign and instrument" of our communion with God and with one another as a human family (CCC 775; *Lumen Gentium,* no. 1).
- Because we are all united to God as his children, we are united with all other members of our human family: "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" (CCC 775, Rev. 7:9). We should celebrate the gifts from the many cultures that are part of our Church—for example, when we can enjoy the tradition that another culture brings into its liturgical celebration.

God's family includes peoples from many parts of the world, each with its own traditions and culture. Discuss the following questions:

- Do we always recognize the diversity of God's family?
- Why or why not?
- What are some examples of different ways to celebrate the diversity of God's family?

Summarize or read excerpts from the article, "For Young Latino Readers, an Image is Missing." Discuss the following questions:

- Why is it a problem that some children do not see themselves in the books they read?
- Do you think that the materials we use in our own classroom (or school or parish) reflect the diversity of the Church in the United States? (Alternatively, diocese, city, county, or state could be inserted in place of the Church.)

Refer to the statistics about what percentages of various ethnic groups make up the Church in the U.S. (or in the diocese, city, county, or state) that the students researched for homework. In this activity, you will compare findings with representation found during students' inventory project.

- What groups are not well-represented?
- Which are over-represented?

Have students perform an inventory of the classroom, identifying what cultural backgrounds are represented by images in their textbooks, on classroom posters, etc. (If your school includes the primary grades, students could also be paired up with classrooms at lower grade levels to do an inventory of their classrooms, reviewing items such as dolls, figures, toys, posters, images in children's books, etc.)

- We are going to work together to take inventory of how well we are doing in our institution (i.e., our school or parish) to celebrate the diversity of God's family. Specifically, we will try to assess whether images in the classroom (or school) show that there are many culture, languages, colors, and traditions in God's family.

If this lesson is being presented in a religious education context where access to a parish library or other body of materials or resources is not available, an alternative option could be to assess the images in the catechetical resources (educator guide, workbooks, etc.) being used to teach the class. It may even be possible to ask the parish religious education coordinator to borrow a set of the teacher guides or workbooks for all grade levels of religious education.

- If none of the above are possible, here is a final alternative that would make a similar point. Look up online Children's Middle Grade Books-Best Sellers or Children's Picture Books-Best Sellers, check out the top 10-20 books out at the local library, and bring them to the class for the students to assess.

Discuss what was discovered:

- What could be done to better ensure that that great diversity of God's family is reflected in the images we see?
- What could we do about this at our own school or parish or in our own classroom?

This project can be most effective when school leadership is engaged prior to the start of the project, so that students can share a report of the results and work with school leadership, parents' organization, or classroom parents to brainstorm ways to supplement existing classroom items with new items that reflect the diversity of God's family.

- Have a few examples of diverse books or materials ready to share.

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